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ABSTRACT

A description and analysis of the America 2000 educational strategy emphasizes the questions of what children and youths deserve and need in terms of education, and what the process of taking children and youth seriously involves in practice for teachers, administrators, parents, and others. After stressing that America 2000 is a national, rather than a federal, strategy, the paper identifies, and assesses the plausibility of, the six national educational goals and four interlocking tracks of personal and institutional effort set forth in America 2000. The disadvantaged environment in which many children live is then discussed in terms of its effects on children's lives and prospects and on the educational system that serves them. The paper then takes a critical look at what children are learning and failing to learn from their parents, educators, peers, and the media. The following sections analyze America 2000 in terms of criticisms leveled against it and the issues of: (1) diversity and pluralism; (2) the purposes of education; (3) overreliance on Head Start; and (4) a national curriculum and national assessment. After asserting the value of good standards and tests as a basis for teacher and administrator education, the paper describes the Boston University's Accelerated Preparation for Teaching program. Final comments focus on family participation in the education of the young and parental choice of schools. (AC)

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OUR CHILDREN'S LIVES

Edwin J. Delattre

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I am honored by Glenda Roberson's invitation to join you today, and I am grateful for your companionship. My topic this afternoon is "Our Children's Lives." Glenda has asked me to devote, under this heading, an hour-and-a-half to a description and analysis of President Bush's *America 2000: An Education Strategy*, leaving a half hour for discussion. You may rely on me to do so, with perhaps a bit more than thirty minutes reserved for our conversation.

When Glenda asked me for a brief summary of my talk, I promised to emphasize that when individuals and institutions accept responsibility for the formal education of children and youths, they bear a great public trust. They commit themselves to doing their level best to fulfill the educational birthrights that belong to every child born in civilized society. Now, clearly, for us to understand the nature of this obligation of fidelity to the trust of the public, we must have a fair grasp of what those educational birthrights are.

We must also know what kinds of individuals and institutions are capable of fulfilling such an obligation: Who is fit to be entrusted with the duties of the high offices of teaching and administration? What must they know? What must they do? What must they *be*? The fundamental question about *America 2000* is, "How does this education policy strategy propose to advance those birthrights and promote fulfillment of that trust for the sake of our children's lives?"

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Now, my view is that, in many respects, advocates of *America 2000* and critics alike tend to focus on the wrong issues. I believe they do not face squarely, and without diversion by other agendas, the questions of what children and youths deserve and need educationally and what it means in practice for teachers, administrators, parents, and others to take children and youths seriously. I will offer arguments and tell stories this afternoon with the intention of directing your attention, above all, to *these* matters, the ones I take to be genuinely central in thinking about our children's lives.

That said, let me turn to *America 2000*. By way of background, let me remind you that before our thirteen colonies declared their independence from England, in 1776, before they successfully fought and won their independence, the authority to charter educational institutions—schools and colleges—resided in the English Crown. When the United States was established as a nation under the Constitution, that authority never came to reside in the federal government; instead, it passed directly to the various states.

The states charter schools, colleges, and universities. Within them, great local authority holds for the operation of those institutions. This is what Lawrence Cremin described as "the genius of American education"—its local autonomy and rich variety of educational opportunity. With limited exceptions, educational accountability, as well as authority, is a matter left to local and state authorities, rather than to the federal government.

This background illuminates a key fact about *America 2000*. It is not a federal strategy, not a program to be implemented and conducted by the federal government. It has been proposed as a *national* strategy, to be implemented by elements that make up the

nation: individual parents and community members, schoolteachers and officials, schools and communities as such, private corporations, private foundations, social service agencies, local and state governments, professional associations and councils—and by no means least of all, students themselves.

The federal government is expected to be supportive within the limits of its authority, but not to take the place of the nation and its components in fulfilling the educational birthrights of our children. In practice, the federal government has no right to usurp local and state authority, and no institutional powers to provide directly educational opportunity to the citizens, residents, and guests of the country except in our military academies, in a handful of specialized institutions, and in training programs in government itself.

Perhaps it is helpful here to distinguish, say, the federal responsibility for our national defense—here, the federal government is solely responsible to the nation and is obliged to budget accordingly—from the federal responsibility for education. In the latter case, the federal government is not solely or even primarily responsible. Therefore, any attempt to improve education and educational opportunity by a federal program *alone* would be doomed to failure, partly because neither the states nor local authorities would tolerate that, and partly because there would be no legitimate way to secure adequate funding at the federal level.

Very well, a *national* strategy. But what is it? The strategy stems from a series of reports in the 1980s to the effect that America is a nation "at risk" because of educational failure; from concern about America's prospects in international markets in the 21st

century; and from a sense that many children in America are unconscionably educationally deprived. The strategy is rooted as well in the conviction expressed by the National Council on Education Standards and Testing, chaired by the governors of South Carolina and Colorado, that "in the absence of well-defined and demanding standards, education in the United States has gravitated toward *de facto* minimum expectations, with curricula focusing on low-level reading and arithmetic skills and on small amounts of factual material in other content areas."[1] The strategy derives directly from the "education summit," held in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 1989, where the president and the governors of the states agreed on six educational goals to be reached by the year 2000. To understand the strategy, we must know the six goals—and assess their plausibility.

The strategy proposes that we aspire to reach these goals by pursuing four simultaneous tracks, four interlocking parts of a national effort. The tracks must also be appraised, their adequacy to the task assessed.

Understanding and evaluating the strategy reasonably requires one further insight: this is an *educational* strategy. It is not a strategy for the social and civic reform of the country or a strategy for treating all the ills we face as a nation. *America 2000* is, above all, an attempt to address the questions, "What should schools be as *educational* institutions rather than social service agencies? How can schools become what they should be; how must they be tied to their local communities, and how can they be provided with the personnel they need? How can they be made duly accountable educationally to the community and to parents? How are we to know whether they are achieving their national educational purposes?"

Obviously, the strategy has implications for our condition as a people. Better education of the young and better universal educational opportunity for children, youths, and adults are likely to affect, for example, the career paths of some among us, in the sense that some youths may pursue legitimate higher education opportunities and employment rather than careers in crime. But *America 2000* is not a strategy for combatting crime. Likewise, the strategy may save some of the young from the effects of cyclical poverty, but it is not a strategy for eliminating poverty. In many ways, the success of the *educational* strategy will turn on the diligence of *other* efforts we make to combat and reduce social ills. The limits of *America 2000* must be clear to us, and we must also grasp that it cannot be expected to flourish all by itself.

What, then, are the six goals? And what are the four interlocking tracks of the strategy? In the paragraphs that follow, I quote intermittently from various *America 2000* documents.

The goals are: by the year 2000, "all children in America will start school ready to learn; the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90%; American students will leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter, including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography. . .and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well; U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement; every adult in America will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship; and every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning."[2]

The four tracks are: first, to provide "for today's students better and more accountable schools"; second, to provide "for tomorrow's students a new generation of American schools"; third, to make us "a nation of students," in the sense that adults are provided with and avail themselves of opportunities for lifelong education; and fourth, to forge "communities where learning can happen."[3]

Each of these tracks has several components. For the first track, to make schools better and more accountable, *America 2000* proposes national academic standards and new tests for assessing progress by students and schools; related report cards for students, schools, districts, states, and the nation as a whole; rewards for academic excellence of students and schools; incentives, including revision of Chapter I, for parental choice of schools (the money to follow the child); and federal funding for the initial implementation of Governors' Academies dedicated to the advanced education of schoolteachers and administrators in leadership and the core subjects—English, history, mathematics, sciences, and geography. The first track also advocates differential compensation for teachers depending on merit, areas of subject matter taught, exposure to dangerous conditions, and willingness to serve as mentors or tutors for other teachers and prospective teachers. And the strategy calls for federal grants to states and districts to design and implement alternative certification programs for teachers and principals.

For the second track, a new generation of American schools to be "invented community by community," communities that form plans to reach the goals are designated *America 2000* communities; 535 New American Schools are to be formed (through transformation of existing schools, possibly) with $1,000,000 in federal incentives for

each congressional and senatorial district in the country; and the New American Schools Development Corporation program to fund from the private sector a series of educational designs to improve schooling dramatically through cooperation between schools, colleges, universities, and corporations. The Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement [DOE/OERI] will develop SMART-LINE—the educational component of the National Research Education Network [NREN] of the National Science Foundation [NSF]—for electronic dissemination of information and instructional materials throughout schools, colleges, libraries, and homes.

For the third track, to mold us into a nation of students, the strategy calls for private sector efforts "to create job-related (and industry specific) skill standards and skill certificates" along with "Skill Clinics where adults can. . .acquire. . .skills they need for jobs they want"; stronger community efforts to promote universal literacy; and a federal government program of skill upgrading for its own employees. The federal government will also expand the National Adult Literacy Survey and seek to enact laws to promote literacy and adult education.

And, for the fourth track, to forge "communities where learning can happen," the strategy of *America 2000* charges parents, families, neighbors, and other adults in communities to devote themselves to children in ways that make good use of the 91% of students' time spent outside of school and that give children encouragement toward high expectations of themselves. The strategy promises "better coordination of existing federal programs with corresponding state and local activities," to make communities worthwhile places for children to grow up—not just grow older.[4]

Now, if as a nation, we aspire to these six goals by these four tracks of personal and institutional effort, will we achieve the result of fulfilling the educational birthrights of our children and even of our fellow adults and ourselves? Will we succeed in making schools better and more accountable while preserving the virtues of their variety and autonomy? Will we improve the quality of the teachers and administrators who bear the public trust? Will we help schools and communities to become more civilized and healthier places for their members to live, learn, and work together?

As you know, and, indeed, as we would all expect, there is in educational policy circles a great range of disagreements about the best answers to these and related questions. Some disagreements have arisen over the most basic premise of *America 2000,* namely that as a nation we have grave educational problems. A few commentators say that we are not at risk at all, and that we are actually doing a better job with a broader public than ever before. Even if this were true—and in my judgment, it is not true—it would tell us nothing about what to do where things are worst, where the lives of children and youths are thrown away, educational opportunity squandered, human potential for worthwhile accomplishment dashed.

Any complacency on our part about fulfillment of the educational birthrights of our children will be paid for *by* those children as they grow older. We ought to keep in mind that even if our very best public and independent schools, and our best students everywhere, do not need to be better or more accountable, even if they exceed in accomplishment any educational standards that might be adopted throughout the nation, even if our best teachers and administrators perform at levels far beyond any present or future certification expectations, we still have many schools among the more than 110,000

in the United States that are mediocre or genuinely bad. And we have a great many youngsters whose future threatens to be bleak. Lawrence Cremin was right, I think, to insist that part of the genius of American education is its variety. But where variety turns sour, it is not a blessing for those subjected to it.

No complacency should be allowed to divert us from the matters that we are unqualifiedly obligated to take seriously with respect to the educational birthrights of the young.

What things *should* education take seriously, whether in the home, the school, or the workplace, and how do we go about taking them seriously?

Nothing is more important than the fact that what happens to children before they are born and in the early years of childhood has tremendous impact on their opportunities and on their receptivity to later education. Children who are malnourished or exposed to alcohol and illegal narcotics and drugs *in utero*, or to sexually transmitted diseases, can be permanently damaged mentally as well as physically, and their prospects for economic success diminished or destroyed before they ever have a chance.

What happens to children, how they are cared for after they are born but before they go to school, is profoundly consequential, too. Neglected, brutalized, molested, left to their own devices, exposed to examples of self-destructive or violent behavior, children do not learn what success means or how the conduct of a successful life can be possible for them. Their destiny is dimmed, their hope diminished.

We should not be surprised that many students from Brooklyn's Thomas Jefferson High School, in which two students were shot to death by a third on February 26, later told reporters that they believe no place else is any safer, that there is no place they can go to improve their opportunities, and that they fear colleges will reject them no matter how hard they work just because they are from Jefferson.[5]

In my work on the streets of our inner cities with police and law enforcement personnel, I see many children, often as young as seven or eight, involved in gangs and drug trafficking, who have no real homes and who will never again see the inside of a school. They have virtually no prospect of becoming productive citizens; there is scant likelihood that they will ever learn enough to respect an honest day's work or to be useful in any form of gainful employment. Many of them will fall into one variety or another of economic dependency, whether in prison or cyclical drug treatment.

Many children so deprived commonly become their own worst enemies. Philippe Bourgois, who lives and conducts ethnographic research in East Harlem, explains that many of the young in his neighborhood who sell drugs on the streets are able to make a bit more than minimum wage "without having to demean themselves in [legal] jobs they believe compromise their sense of dignity." They drop out of school to enter the crack traffic, as they say, "to get some of mine's."[6]

There is a special kind of heartache in witnessing the lives of young people whose sense of dignity is so confused that it can be satisfied only by the ruthless exploitation of others even more helpless than they. When I am in their company, I am sometimes recalled to my own early job experience. My first job was in a dairy, during the summer when I

was thirteen. My daily task was to put thousands of sticks in popsicles. It was boring, and companionship on the job did not relieve the boredom. But it was no affront to my dignity, perhaps because I knew that I would not be confined to such work for very long.

There is no prospect that children deprived of family life and safe neighborhoods will learn from mean streets about the dignity that attends honest work. My own view is that we must provide residential schools—highly professional orphanages, if you like—where devoted and well-educated adults can raise these children. I would like to see a plan for such a program—not as part of *America 2000*, but as a supplement to it, and I would prefer to see these residential schools also chartered by the states.

When large numbers of such children and youths enter public schools, their problems can undermine the educational purposes those schools were originally intended to serve. The bitter facts of deprivation and exposure to depravity in childhood can spoil everything else. One such inner New York City junior high school was described last month in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* by Washington, DC, writer Edward P. Moser. Moser's sister teaches English there, and he had gone to see her. Suffering from a headache, he asked for directions to any nearby pharmacy. His sister suggested he go to the school clinic. In the following description, I quote intermittently from his column.

When Moser reached the school clinic, he was surprised to find "dozens of instructors, pharmacists, and students [in a] looming clinic. . .the size of a small hospital." First, he got in the line marked "Pharmaceutical Goods." He asked a student whether he could get Tylenol there and was told no, the line was only for distribution of condoms to all students who wanted them. He went to a second line, but was told that line was for

dispensing sterile hypodermic needles for drug users. A student directed him to a line at another counter. As he walked across to that line, he passed a long line where students were drinking from vials provided by a nurse. The vials contained methadone, a substitute drug for heroin addicts. When he said to a bystander, "Well, at least they're not handing out heroin," the bystander pointed to another line. There, students were snorting heroin distributed by the school clinic in an effort to reduce transmission of AIDS and hepatitis by dirty needles.

In a large classroom within the clinic, a teacher was lecturing on time management. Moser asked a student what was up. She told him this was a vocational course for single mothers. When Moser "remarked that none of the students appeared to be pregnant," the student said the school expected many of them would soon be unwed mothers and required "a certificate on how to raise a family while working full-time." The next room was filled with students "crouched under the desks, their hands clasped behind their heads." An assistant teacher explained the course to Moser, "They're practicing protective measures for drive-by shootings." In yet another room, he saw students apparently taking a written test. He asked if that were so. A teacher replied, "The school doesn't give many tests. We've found that exams produce too much stress. This is a class for coping with dropping out. We teach the kids how to file for food stamps and public assistance. . . .[T]hey're practicing how to fill out an application for unemployment benefits." When Moser left the school, he could hear gunfire in the streets.[7]

I can confirm from my own experience that this chronicle of education abandoned is no exaggeration. There are, for an alarming number of our children, no prospects of economic or other success, and no examples in their lives of apparent success except drug

traffickers, pimps, prostitutes, contract killers, child pornographers, and extortionists who acquire flashy wealth by ruthless predation on the weak and the innocent.

We need to think very thoroughly about how we can transform such wastelands into neighborhoods and into real communities—as well as communities where learning about English, history, sciences, mathematics, and geography is encouraged and supported. This undertaking will live or die on great local and regional will and fortitude—and I do not know whether we have enough of those to go around.

These are certainly not problems that will be solved by federal legislation. But we have one irrefutable fact on our side: virtually all children, no matter their condition, circumstances, or disabilities, *learn*. The poorest children learn. Many of the lessons they are taught by the streets are despicable, but they *learn*, even if only how to steal and bully. If they can learn these things, they can learn good things properly taught in decent schools. So there is no excuse for despair, or for underestimation of the educational potential of the young, no matter their race, gender, or economic condition.

I stress this because of the bigotry in our land against children, the false underestimate of their powers by public servants who ought to know better, that leads to low expectations and shattered possibilities.

As you think about this problem during your reflections on educational policy, you may want to look at a speech called "Discoveries and Inventions," delivered by Abraham Lincoln four times during 1858 and 1859, lastly before the Springfield, Illinois, Library

Association. In that speech, Lincoln celebrated the invention of printing and the effects of books made accessible to a broad public. He said:

> The effects could not come, all at once. It required time to bring them out; and they are still coming. The *capacity* to read, could not be multiplied as fast as the means of reading. [Lincoln meant that it takes longer to teach a public to read than it does to print the books.] Spelling-books just began to go into the hands of children; but the teachers were not very numerous, or very competent; so it is safe to infer they did not advance so speedily as they do now-a-days. It is very probably—almost certain—that the great mass of men, at that time, were utterly unconscious, that their *conditions*, or their *minds* were capable of improvement. They not only looked upon the educated few as superior beings; but they supposed themselves to be naturally incapable of rising to equality. To emancipate the mind from this false and underestimate of itself, is the great task that printing came into the world to perform.[8]

For our own time, we should add that emancipating the minds of children from "a false and underestimate" of their own powers of learning is one of the most important tasks good teachers, administrators, librarians, and parents come "into the world to perform."

In my judgment, it is both cruel and disgraceful to undermine aspiration in the young. In practice, children are undermined not only by being taught to underestimate themselves, but also by being taught that they are victims of an evil society. I have

personally witnessed what gang enforcement officers Robert Jackson and Wesley McBride describe in their book, *Understanding Street Gangs*.

When mothers of delinquents and law enforcement authorities come in contact, mothers often make excuses for the children, in "the form of accusations against society in general. Thus, children are taught early that they are not responsible for their actions. . . . By the time the youngsters reach their mid-teens. . .they truly believe that they are victims and that they have the absolute right, if not the duty, to do whatever they want, whenever they want."[9]

Often their vision of the world succumbs to what Bertrand Russell called "the fallacy of the superior virtue of the oppressed." This way of thinking, that anyone treated badly by another is thereby proven to have personal merit, destroys responsible self-appraisal and thwarts aspiration.

I doubt that anything worse in the way of education can befall girls and boys than to be taught that they are *mere* victims of society. Such teaching, however well-intentioned or grounded in desperation it may be, diminishes children in their own eyes to such a degree that a realistic and hopeful sense of their own real possibilities for achievement and decency—and for happiness—may be forever obscured to them. Parents and others who thwart youthful aspiration in this way famish the best of human nature within their children. The consequences threaten always to be dreadful, because, as C. S. Lewis rightly explained to teachers, "famished nature will be avenged."[10]

Still, it is impossible to deny that much of what every child born into civilized society deserves as a birthright is denied these children. And it in both conceptually and practically impossible to believe that children who have been treated as though adults owe them nothing should themselves feel that they owe very much to any other human being.

Obviously, it is not only such extreme cases that deserve to be taken seriously. All human beings are creatures of habit, and our capacity for imitation is among the most important elements of our make-up. What we learn to do habitually through the guidance of adults in our early lives, and the behavior we witness and therefore tend to imitate, figure powerfully in the kinds of people we become; early experience influences, for better or worse, how we think of ourselves and our possibilities. It remains true, just as it was when Aristotle said it over 2,000 years ago, that "it is a matter of real importance whether our early education confirms in us one set of habits or another." He added, "It would be nearer the truth to say that it makes a very great difference indeed, in fact all the difference in the world."[11]

Children who do not hear courteous and thoughtful conversation among adults, and who are not included in loving conversation with adults, do not make good progress in learning language. My colleague, Professor Judith Schickedanz, explains that while "children are predisposed to learning oral language. . .it is misleading to claim that being surrounded by talk is enough. It is *being included in talk*, and *being treated like a competent language partner* that makes the difference."[12] She emphasizes that similar engagement with adults is essential to early learning of written language. Children who are not exposed early to picture books, to stories, to the alphabet, to storybooks, and to adults

who read and write with them, face enormous later obstacles to literacy, and therefore to economic and other forms of success.

Children who do not learn early the lessons John Silber describes, in the words of Rudyard Kipling as "the Gods of the Copybook Headings," tend not to grasp much about personal responsibility or to form realistic expectations for their lives. The copybook headings are moral lessons presented in beautiful penmanship at the top of pages in copybooks. In times past, students copied these lessons over and again in order to learn good penmanship, new vocabulary, and worthwhile ideas: "Persevere in accomplishing a complete education"; "Build your hopes of fame on virtue"; "Trifles alienate friends"; "Employment prevents vice"; "Time cuts down all, the great and small." As President Silber explains in his book *Straight Shooting*, children abandoned to long hours in front of a television set easily come to believe that they can change reality as easily as they can change channels and also that the world will deliver whatever they desire just as the television does. How different to learn early from copybooks and the Mother Goose rhymes that "If wishes were horses, then beggars would ride," and to understand that wishful thinking is no substitute for hard work and disciplined preparation for it.[13]

When children do not learn such lessons, and as preteens or teenagers are *given*, without earning it, hefty levels of purchasing power—and we dare not forget that the preteenage consumer market in America is an $8 billion-a-year industry[14]—the worst consequence is *not* simply that they will tend to squander money on fads, fashion, and tastelessness in general. The worst consequence is that they come to view being entertained as the center of their lives and that they fall into boredom because they have not enough between their ears to keep them busy.

This condition signals the death of healthy ambition and high aspiration, and it therefore undermines the drive to be worthy of success at anything more important than being popular or being entertained. Children and youths in this condition are not likely even to learn that a life spent on self-amusement promises nothing of fulfillment, none of the satisfactions of a serious job well done. Such children do not become progressively more mature, they only grow older; and few schools are educationally powerful enough to overcome deeply ingrained habits of indolence and thoughtlessness generated by their circumstances outside of school and in the home. This is a measure of the real gravity of our educational situation.

Nothing could be more futile than for us to believe that we can with impunity manipulate the young to pursue trivial and easy gratification today for the sake of our own short-term profits. It is both selfish and foolish to treat them as mere consumers of junk now and expect them to become the kinds of people who will tomorrow advance productivity and the quality of services in America or otherwise contribute to the strength of our institutions. We will reap what we sow—generations of our young who abhor hard work and who insist they have nothing to do, even when they live within walking distance of free libraries, museums, and concerts.

These are among the reasons, not incidentally, that in managing the Chelsea Public Schools, Boston University places highest priority on early childhood education and strong elementary education capable of securing preschool learning. We also focus on intergenerational literacy—that is, on the promotion of literacy among parents, including

thirteen-year-old and older unwed mothers for whom there are often too few educational opportunities, and on instruction for them about how to teach their own children.

Unless the cycle of illiteracy is broken at this level, it is indeed only wishful thinking to expect to fulfill the educational birthrights of the young. On these grounds, I reject emphatically all claims that we do not have grave educational problems to solve if we are to satisfy our obligations to our children.

None of what I have said implies that all six of the goals of *America 2000* are worthy of our aspiration, let alone that they are achievable. My own view is that goal number four, that by the year 2000, U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics, implicitly denies the obvious fact that talent, achievement, and educational opportunity are very widely distributed in the world and among nations. No single nation can possibly place its students ahead of all others. I think it borders on the ridiculous to claim otherwise.

Goal five, that all adults will be equipped to compete in a global economy, seems to me to be equally unconsidered. Not all adults or youths need to compete in a global economy; most of us need to be good at our work in order to provide worthwhile services and products, but that is a far different matter.

We do not compete in a global economy when we teach our classes, when we perform volunteer community services, when we devote ourselves most fully to being parents, and so on. The suggestion that active participation in a global economy is elemental for life in the 21st century is implausible at best and dangerous at worst—because

it obscures the dimensions of actual life in local settings among the specific individuals who depend on us that really deserve our most considered involvement on a daily basis. Whenever I hear or read positions that focus exclusively on "the global," I am recalled to that exquisite insight of George Eliot in *Middlemarch* that "people glorify all sorts of bravery except the bravery they might show on behalf of their nearest neighbors."[15]

Still, disagreements about *America 2000* range much farther than this. Specifically, the most intense and persistent disagreements center on the legitimacy and effectiveness of national standards and tests: the possibility of establishing national standards and tests *and* preserving local educational authority; the relationship between national standards and tests with equitable educational opportunity across lines of race, ethnicity, gender, culture, and economic condition; the trustworthiness of national standards and tests as measures of accomplishment or accountability in a country whose population is increasingly diverse; and the state of the art in testing itself.

Heated disagreements surround proposals for alternative certification of teachers and administrators; issues of school choice are particularly acrimonious, and the idea of choice itself rankles most critics of *America 2000;* and many social and educational policy advocates insist that the *real* problems of education are problems of money and poverty—problems that they claim only more money can solve.

In these disputes, it is quite clear where the architects of *America 2000* stand, as both their writings and their conversations testify. Perhaps the most important educational policy document produced in Washington so far in 1992 is one presented by the National

Council on Education Standards and Testing, *Raising Standards for American Education.* Again, in the description that follows, I quote intermittently from the report.

The Council was established by federal legislation in June 1991 that charges it to "advise on the desirability and feasibility of national standards and tests, and recommend long-term policies, structures, and mechanisms for setting voluntary education standards and planning an appropriate system of tests."[16] In their report, the Council concludes that "national standards tied to assessments are desirable" and that they can "create high expectations for students." The Council goes so far as to say, "They are critical for the nation in three primary ways: to promote educational equity, to preserve democracy and enhance civic culture, and to improve economic competitiveness. . . ," and the report continues, "Further, national education standards would help to provide an increasingly diverse and mobile population with shared values and knowledge."

The architects of this report emphasize that "standards must be voluntary, not mandated by the federal government. . .must be national, not federal. . .[and] must provide focus and direction [for high expectations]. . .not become a national curriculum." They hold that "the system of assessments must consist of multiple methods of measuring progress, not a single test. . .must be voluntary, not mandatory. . .[and that] the overriding importance of ensuring fairness for all children needs to be addressed. Resolving issues of validity, reliability, and fairness," they stress, "is critical to the success of the new system."[17]

The report presents national standards and assessments as necessary for successful educational reform, not as sufficient for it, not as "panaceas for the nation's education

problems." The text reads, "Other required elements of reform include state curriculum frameworks tied to the standards, professional development opportunities for teaching to the standards, new roles and responsibilities for educators, technology that enhances instructional opportunities, assistance to families and communities in need, incentives to inspire better efforts by students and educators, early intervention where problems are identified, and the reduction of health and social barriers to learning."[18]

The authors recommend that "states should work together in developing assessment instruments" recognizing that "different assessments may be developed for different curricula" and that "there will be diverse interpretations of content standards that lead to differing curricula and teaching practices." They encourage exploration of "performance-based assessments, such as portfolios and projects. . .[that] use open-ended tasks, focus on higher-order or complex thinking skills, [and] require significant time." Clearly, the report exhibits interest in assessment of individual student work *and* assessment of educational programs and systems, in terms of the national standards, and on the model of the National Assessment of Education Progress [NAEP].[19]

The Council focuses on the need for a substantial coordinating structure for establishment and implementation of the standards and assesaments, including a "politically balanced" National Education Goals Panel and a National Education Standards and Assessments Council appointed by the Panel. "Families, educators, and policymakers must all work together," they say, and "teachers will need a deeper knowledge of subject matter and a better understanding of pedagogy" that will require "cooperation from universities, especially colleges of arts and sciences, in teacher preparation."[20]

By way of illustration of what teachers ought to study and know, say, in English, the report offers, "Literature is the subject matter specific to the English curriculum. Reading and writing, speaking and listening are communication skills that underlie it."[21] History, it says, "involves in-depth knowledge of the important people, ideas, events, and trends that have helped to shape the world. In addition to major political events, history includes such areas as social and economic developments over time, civics, art, and music, and the history of ideas. . . .A solid grasp of America's history teaches students an appreciation for both the diversity and the shared experiences and values that have given the United States its unique character."[22]

The National Council on Education Standards and Testing established Task Forces on Standards, Assessment, Implementation, and on each of the "core" disciplines. In their reports, published as appendices to the overall report, several of the Task Forces identified and responded to objections to *America 2000* and to national standards and assessments in particular. Much has been written elsewhere on these issues in recent months, as in *Voices from the Field: 30 Expert Opinions on America 2000,* published by the William T. Grant Foundation Commission on work, Family, and Citizenship and the Institute for Educational Leadership. There is a collection of pieces in the March 1992 issue of *Network News and Views,* published by the Educational Excellence Network, and most educational publications—*Phi Delta Kappan, Education Week,* and the like—continue to provide coverage of differing accounts of the relative merits of *America 2000.*

As I have observed above, the disagreements are many, but let me try here to put the objections to *America 2000* into a kind of comprehensive sketch. This is not a

description of any one critic's position, but rather a fabric woven of the objections offered by a number of critics.

The tone of critics is that *America 2000* is wrongheaded in at least some of its goals and in most of its means. On this account, *America 2000* is inimical to educational equity in America, insensitive to diversity and the rights and needs of minorities, and short on compassion for the poor and disadvantaged. National standards and assessments, the argument runs, will lead inevitably to a national curriculum at the expense of local initiative, and no common standards will ever be genuinely accepted by our diverse population, in any case; externally mandated testing is unreliable and discriminatory, and it will cause bad educational practices in school, including "teaching to the tests"; worse, tests themselves generate competitiveness and individualism in students rather than cooperativeness and feeling for others and are therefore educationally dangerous; neither can schools be improved by placing them in competition with each other through programs of parental choice; alternative certification programs threaten to undermine the profession of education and its standards; and, finally, we should not be spending money on such controversial matters when we need more money in our schools for supplies and salaries, in our neighborhoods, and in our social programs.

Now, as I said earlier, I think that much of the discourse about *America 2000* between advocates and critics focuses inordinately on these issues, to the neglect of real attention to the educational needs and birthrights of children and youths. Let me try in what follows to show how addressing this *domain* of controversy itself, with focus on children, can lead us to more instructive thought about taking the young seriously.

What should we think about *America 2000* in light of these objections? First, what about diversity, equity, minorities, and the disadvantaged—in addition to my observations earlier this afternoon?

In my judgment, no one who has any real grasp of the diversity of human beings as individuals, the diversity of groups, or the diversity of human institutions ever celebrates diversity for its own sake. Diversity is boundless, and it therefore includes much that is not only despicable, but also profoundly immoral and genuinely evil. The diversity of individuals embraces racists, sexists, serial killers, child molesters, and other types of malevolent people who take pleasure in inflicting suffering on others. Diversity among groups embraces fascists, terrorists, criminal conspiracies, congressional malfeasance, political corruption, and the excesses and deficiencies of the Ku Klux Klan as well as tyrannical governments throughout the world. And the diversity of human institutions embraces the worst schools on earth, crack houses, showplaces for child pornography, and political prisons where the innocent are remorselessly tortured. None of these domains of diversity merits respect or celebration, and anyone who wants to appreciate this point fully would be well advised to read Dante's *Inferno*.

What deserves to be celebrated—and has been at the root of our vitality as a country—is not diversity, but pluralism. As sociologist Gerald Grant observes in "Education, Character, and American Schools," our institutions can be pluralistic only on the premise of the *common* beliefs of a free country, and he goes on to say:

> [A]lthough we respect differences of opinion on many issues, there are some salient or core beliefs to which all subscribe. Pluralism is

> in fact not possible without agreement on some kinds of values: the minimal order required for dialogue, the willingness to listen to one another, respect for truth, rejection of racism (or openness to participation in the dialogue), as well as those transcendent values that shore up the whole society—a sense of altruism and service to others and respect for personal effort and hard work. Without such agreement one does not have a public, but a kind of radical relativism; not pluralism but mere coexistence.[23]

Our educational institutions ought to be resolved to embody the highest regard for pluralism, and for the kinds of differences among us that are either natural—such as color, ethnicity, gender—or else cultural. I reserve the word "cultural" here to refer to the best that has been thought and said, the domains of knowledge and faith that have brought worthwhile meaning to the conduct of life, and have spurred reasoned control over individual passions that are dangerous to oneself and others when allowed to exercise dominion over behavior. I refer also to the dimensions of family and community life that foster regard for others, respect for persons and their rights and interests, a sense of justice, and dispositions and habits of courage rather than rashness and cowardice, temperance rather than self-indulgence, and wisdom and humility rather than foolishness and arrogance. In such a context, there is nothing wrong, and much that is right, with individualism and a sense of competition. Within the boundaries of pluralism, these are neither rapacious nor selfish, and anyone who dismisses them out of hand undermines the idea of personal responsibility and with it, respect for individual liberty, individual rights, and justice itself.

Here, I return to my theme of what we must take seriously when we think about education. The most fundamental purposes of all education worthy of the name are the formation of good character, rigorous intellect, abundant imagination, and discriminating taste. The philosopher John Stuart Mill rightly observed that human beings are human beings before they undertake specific occupations and callings. He emphasized that if education in the home and at school makes them competent and judicious human beings, they will be well prepared to become competent and judicious in the specific walks of public and private life they enter.

In this tradition, William Cory, a very astute nineteenth century English schoolmaster, described the essential purposes of schooling:

> [Y]ou go to a great school. . .for arts and habits; for the habit of attention, for the art of expression, for the art of assuming at a moment's notice, a new intellectual position, for the art of entering quickly into another person's thoughts, for the habit of submitting to censure and refusion, for the art of indicating assent or dissent in graduated terms, for the habit of regarding minute points of accuracy, for the art of working out what is possible in a given time, for taste, discrimination, for mental courage and mental soberness. And above all you go to a great school for self-knowledge.[24]

These are not idle words. They carry weight today just as they did when Cory wrote them, because human beings do not change over the centuries, or they change only glacially, and because there can be no adequate substitutes for the formation of good character—the

settled disposition to listen to reason rather than impulse—and refined intellect. This theme resonates in ancient and modern civilizations across lines of geography and time, and we must try to live up to it at home and in our schools, colleges, and universities if we are to fulfill the educational birthrights of our children.

Developing dispositions and habits of decency, justice, and fair play figures prominently in this description of the central goals for teachers and students—submitting their beliefs to the test of reasoned discourse, searching out honest errors, recognizing their own fallibility, disagreeing civilly and with good manners, achieving a sense of proportion in the conduct of daily life, paying attention to facts, and trying to see things from the minds and hearts and eyes of the people who will be affected by their decisions and actions. In a word, the ideal embraces the acceptance of responsibility for our own lives.

The obvious and unmistakable assumption of this tradition is that whatever knowledge and good habits of mind and heart students have acquired at home, there is more to be done at school: expanding the knowledge, refining the intelligence, developing intellectual and moral culture in hope of enabling the student to become a human being functioning at his or her very best.

It seems to me that we can—and, in many ways, already have—achieved a sense that transcends specific cultural groups of what a human being functioning at his or her best is like. Such a person is not doomed to ignorance of the disciplines of knowing, is not a predator on the helpless and the innocent, is not a fanatic. Also, such a person possesses wide and deep knowledge, refined taste and judgment—and the ability to form reasoned

opinions with a sense of independence—and is capable of generous understanding and gives real consideration to others.

Accordingly, I do not see how the differences among us in America, whether they are natural or cultural, thwart the possibility of a shared sense of fairness, of shared knowledge and mental habits worthy of our acquisition, and therefore of fundamental educational purposes. In my experience, race, ethnicity, and gender are no obstacles to good faith and shared understanding or to our learning from each other across such lines of difference.

In my own case, spending so much time on the mean streets of inner cities, I have probably learned as much from black women, especially black women who seem older than they are, as I have from anyone else in the past fifteen years. After all, when we speak with each other as parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents—and I meet many great-grandmothers younger than I am who are raising their granddaughters' children—we want very much the same things for our children and their lives: that they should have opportunities for happiness, that they should be worthy of those opportunities, and that they should outlive us. In many profoundly important ways, we are not very different. It is true of us, as Yeats observed, that as human beings we "love what vanishes"—we love other human beings who will one day die, and at our best, we hope that they will find fulfillment within the boundaries of their own mortality. We willingly make sacrifices for their sake.

The fact is, we can learn the same things about loving children from reading Sojurner Truth that we can from reading Yeats. Sojourner Truth said, in her marvelous

"Ain't I a Woman" speech in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, "I have born thirteen children, and seen them most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me."[25] There are very good reasons for reading both.

Suppose that I am right about these things. Would that tell us anything about compassion for the poor and disadvantaged? At least this—that no one can conscionably neglect them in matters of policy, and that more than *America 2000* will be needed to overcome neglect and abandonment of children, their subjection to the savagery of the streets, and indifference to their powers of learning.

I am glad for the recent federal commitment of $600 million to expand Head Start, although I am not certain exactly how the funds will be spent. It is not clear to me how much of the money can be absorbed effectively in the short run, or how well-trained the needed early childhood educators will be.

My principal fear is that there will be an over-reliance on the powers of Head Start. Last summer, I spoke in Williamsburg, Virginia, before a gathering of child welfare personnel, drug treatment officials and researchers, pediatricians, and public policymakers, about ethics in relation to child abuse, drug consumption and dependency, and urban gang predation. One of the participants rose to extoll the virtues of Head Start and reported that in a gang ravaged section of San Francisco, he and his colleagues had asked residents what would be the most important thing they could do to combat gangs. The response was to establish a Head Start program in one of the tenement buildings. This met with great approval in the Williamsburg gathering, until I asked, "And what did they say when you asked them to identify the second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth most important things?

Because no Head Start program by itself will substantially reduce or eliminate gang predation on the helpless or recruitment of the young."

The reply to my question was a disconcerted silence—and I earnestly hope that we will not find ourselves placing a heavier burden on Head Start than it can possibly bear. I was encouraged that several of the participants at Williamsburg approached me later to say they were grateful to be reminded that no program, including Head Start, can bear the burden of social reform alone.

Must national standards lead to a national curriculum? Will tests lead to "teaching to the tests"? Are tests inevitably unfair?

One of the replies that we can hear and read in Washington is that we already have a national curriculum. The *Report of the Standards Task Force* offers this argument: that "except for a small percentage of our nation's students who are headed for elite four-year colleges," we now have "a *de facto* minimum competency curriculum" influenced by state and local policy and by "textbook publishers who cater to the lowest common denominator in content, test developers and education administrators who use standardized tests. . .and teachers who have had neither adequate training nor appropriate role models in their own education experience."[26]

But this reply does not meet the question, and all the attention paid to it diverts us from worthwhile questions about taking the young seriously. It is quite evident that even if it were true that we have a *de facto* national curriculum, *it* does not follow that it is a good thing to have one; neither does it follow that a national curriculum of one sort or another,

better or worse, is inevitable no matter what we do. I do not believe that we have a national curriculum now, because I know many young people who never intended to enter so called "elite" colleges and who have nonethelesa acquired fine educational backgrounds through secondary school. Their courses were not limited to shabby textbooks or incompetent teachers, nor were their schools undermined by low expectations. Thus, I do not believe that a national curriculum is in any case inevitable; neither do I see evidence that national standards imply a national curriculum. National standards, however we understand "voluntary" in this context, have no power to eliminate the imagination of teachers and administrators who are well prepared to bear the public trust, nor to override local control of the curriculum and the climate of the school.

"But," critics will reply, "it will all be the same everywhere, because teachers will teach to the tests." This is a simple *non sequitur.* Even if teachers do teach to the tests, there is no reason to think "it will all be the same everywhere." And what is wrong with teaching to tests—provided they are good tests? Let me explain.

When I was a logic teacher for lower-level undergraduates, and I was also working with teachers throughout the country on the development of logic units for secondary students, I had very much in mind the principal hazard of teaching logic: that you will end up giving students tools with which they can support their own worst prejudices, and with which they can bully others and trap others into apparent foolishness. Mary Wollstonecraft put the danger rightly in 1797 when she wrote, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* that too many "men. . .seem to employ their reason to justify prejudices. . .rather than to root them out. . . .[A] kind of intellectual cowardice prevails which makes many men shrink from the task. . . ."[27] She might have added that this is a tendency in many people,

regardless of gender, and thus it must be guarded against in all teaching of logic. How, then, should a teacher test—and teach?

You want your students to learn that some stories have only one legitimate side—there is only one correct answer to the question whether selling illegal drugs to children is ever justified, just as there is only one correct answer to the question of the ratio of the square of the hypotenuse of a right triangle to the squares of the other two sides. A few stories have two sides, and most stories have many sides, at least three. For instance, a person might hold that all the people in this room are men, and be wrong, while another might hold that all are women, and be wrong. A third side is that some are men and some are women; a fourth is that there are exactly so many women and so many men—and that side would be correct or incorrect, depending on the count, and so on. Thus, any good logic test, and any good conversation in class, would require of students that they articulate the very best case for at least three sides of an argument, with ample criticism of each, and also give a reasoned account of the better or best side, unless the strength of the cases is arguably equal.

Students might be expected to identify and address at least three sides to an issue such as abortion, *viz.*, that abortion is normally wrong and should be illegal; that it is not wrong and should be legal; that it is wrong and should be legal nonetheless; that it is sometimes wrong, sometimes not, and that the individual woman should have the sole authority of decision, or that she should not, and so on. If the test is worth having, it is worth teaching to, because the teacher will expect the students to learn how to think well—rigorously and abundantly—throughout the course.

The question of *national* assessment is, "How good are the tests—*tests*, not *test*—and are they worth teaching to?" That question remains in the balance, and it cannot be answered until the tests are available in draft form. The same points can be made about fairness and discrimination; the issue remains in the balance—unless the claim is made that *all* tests discriminate against minorities; and that is not only a preposterous claim, it is also bigoted, since it summarily denigrates the powers of learning among certain individual human beings just because they are members of groups. But learning powers are *in* and *of* the individual—not *in* and *of* the group. No such stereotypes belong in education—or anywhere else, for that matter.

Good standards and tests can provide useful information and insight for prescribing curricula for the education, training, and certification of teachers and administrators, too. Perhaps they will help us to avoid the false extremes offered by commentators who claim that good teachers are those who know enough about methods and those who claim that good teachers are those who know enough about subject matter content. Neither extreme is true—each is a half-truth.

In one alternative teacher certification plan that I recently helped to draft for the Boston University School of Education, called Accelerated Preparation for Teaching, or APT, we countered these half-truths. As with most philosophers, I believe the best way to prove a thing to be possible is to show that it is actual, and thus I want to describe the alternative certification program we intend to implement.

The purpose of Project APT is to improve the teacher certification process by providing a highly profesaional alternative certification program for outstanding liberal arts

graduates who aspire to become teachers. The Project combines accelerated preliminary formal education and training with an extended period of guidance and assistance once the graduates have entered the field of teaching. Project APT relies on the demonstrated knowledge of each candidate in one or more of the scholarly, scientific, and artistic disciplines. The program applies the principle that no one should be admitted to the responsibilities of teaching without such knowledge. As classicist Gilbert Highet explained, "One cannot understand even the rudiments of an important subject without knowing its higher levels—at least, not well enough to teach it." [Gilbert Highet, *The Art of Teaching* (1950), p. 13.]

Furthermore, a person who teaches a subject but does not love it enough to learn it well cannot be a worthy educational exemplar for students. The Boston University School of Education affirms this principle throughout its programs; all our undergraduates take at least seventy-four hours of their studies in the College of Liberal Arts.

At the same time, Project APT takes into account the words of philosopher Sidney Hook:

> Great teachers are rare, and lucky are the students who encounter them. Great teachers are not always great or original scholars. The popular assumptions that anyone who knows a lot about a subject can teach it effectively and that mastery in teaching inevitably develops with mastery of a subject are myths. The kind of teaching to which many students have, especially in the past, been exposed in liberal arts colleges should have exploded those myths long ago.

[Sidney Hook, *Out of Step: An Unquiet Life in the 20th Century* (1986), p. 53.]

The central question of educational reform in the United States ought to be, "How are we to fill the nation's classrooms and schools with teachers and administrators who are at once entirely at home in the higher reaches of the intellectual disciplines *and* deeply proficient in the arts of teaching?"

We believe that the best answer is, and has been, first, to attract to teaching very able people. Second, to require that these two dimensions of learning be central to the higher education of all students who plan to become teachers and administrators. Third, to provide sound programs by which others who have the intellectual background are able to enter school teaching and administration without needless obstruction. We are concerned about both teachers and administrators, because in schools where good administrators are lacking, even the most diligent work of the best teachers is routinely thwarted.

It is well known in many walks of life that academic instruction and field training must, not only be united coherently, but also made indivisible in the mind of the practitioner. If they are not, the power of academic instruction is invariably diminished. Teach aircraft pilots in a classroom one thing about safe flying and a different thing in a cockpit, and the classroom will be forgotten. So, too, with police; teach in a police academy respect for law and the rights of the public, and then subject recruits to the guidance of field training officers who are contemptuous of civil rights and of the people they are to serve, and the result will be a department with problems of brutality and corruption—a department riven by disrespect for limits.

Boston University's Project APT is therefore designed to forge in each participating student that union of scholarly achievement and artistry in teaching essential to fine schools and classrooms. We will help participating students to refine and advance their scholarly and scientific backgrounds, as necessary, and to grasp the power of the intellectual disciplines in practice from the perspective of great teachers—not only by studying great teachers of ancient and modern times, but also by teaching with, and learning from, truly fine teachers who work in classrooms today.

We expect the students in Project APT, given their intellectual background, to take quite readily to the idea of preliminary and continuing self-directed programs of study. We plan to help them tailor their programs individually, in light of their different prior accomplishments, but we also intend to provide a common core of study on the subject of teaching itself.

The program of study as a whole, including brief but intensive study on campus and subsequent immersion in professionally guided classroom teaching, has been designed collaboratively by current practitioners with strong records of success in the field and University faculty who have demonstrated their ability to design pre-service programs.

Finally, the beginning teachers prepared through this program will be supported during their first year of practice. Our program thus meets one fundamental criticism of teacher education: that many programs leave beginning teachers to their own devices without opportunity to draw on the experience of senior teachers and faculty in order to address unanticipated problems. We know of the sense of isolation that can undermine

classroom teaching, particularly in the early years, and we realize that the most earnest desire to improve can be shattered by daunting circumstances.

Project APT does not abandon students as they enter the profession of teaching. At each stage of the Project, we will put our best resources at the disposal of the students, from the selection of advisors at entry through sustained contact with exceptional practitioners and University faculty once the graduates have entered the profession.

Of course, we do not view our alternative certification program as a substitute for our other professional programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. It is a genuine alternative, applicable in specific cases. I should add, for your understanding of our sense of the sorts of people who should be drawn into positions of public trust, that our SAT score averages for entering freshmen in the School of Education are 245 points above the national average. We want our children to keep company with adults who can reach the highest possible standards of teaching, though we by no means consider high SAT scores by themselves sufficient evidence of such potential.

Part of what the format of APT proves, by the way, is that neither liberal arts colleges, nor schools of education, nor any other *kind* of higher or postsecondary education institution is solely qualified to contribute to the preservice and inservice education of teachers and administrators. But there are many in education who overconfidently believe that they alone are qualified. What we must look for is real rigor and depth in the disciplines of knowing and real substance in the teaching prepracticum and practicum, plus intelligence and character in the advisors, tutors, and mentors. Then we

have a chance to make the best of our opportunities to provide high-quality education for our children.

I have left until last the issues of family participation in the education of the young and of parental choice of schools. With respect to choice, I know only a handful of people in Washington and elsewhere who believe that school choice is a cure-all for everything that is wrong with education, and none of them deserves to be taken seriously. Some of the critics of *America 2000* write as though the entire strategy rested on school choice as a cure-all, but that seems to me to be obviously false.

The principal questions about choice are which patterns of options for parents are likely to serve the interests of their children, and which forms of compensation for the chosen schools can be provided without destroying whatever is worthwhile in the schools left behind. The idea is to hold the feet of weaker schools to the fire, to provide incentives for them to improve, and not to make the financial costs of student departure so massive that the possibility of reform is burnt to the ground. There are many ways to get choice wrong, and I suspect there are relatively few that will work well within the public sector and across public and independent school boundaries.

When I think about choice, I cannot help remembering how parochial schools in Mississippi, for example, were in the vanguard of real school integration, which helps to explain why so many non-Catholic minority children have attended them in the past or are now students in them. This leadership in social justice *and* educational seriousness seems to me worth considering when we ask ourselves about the appropriateness of vouchers and about how we should understand and apply principles of separation of church and state.

My own view is that choice calmly considered may enrich educational opportunity—but I am not altogether hopeful that the issues will meet with much calmness, let alone reasoned consideration, given the special interests that are at stake. We will see.

Let me conclude on a positive note in anticipation of our conversation, and do so by trying to say what my wife and I have tried to be as parents concerned for the education of our daughter. For I believe that much of what things will look like in the year 2000 depends on parents—and not all children will be blessed with parents who devote themselves to education.

Still, the adults in a great many American homes and educational institutions work very hard on the sound education of the young. Lots of us have thought for a long time about the educational birthrights of children and about how we should take our children and our students seriously. Many parents, grandparents, and teachers understand, with columnist Walter Lippmann, that "traditions of civility are not carried in our genes" and that the institutions of free enterprise and government by consent that we rightly cherish do not survive by accident. They know that if we want our children to succeed—to escape the combination of tyranny, bureaucratic corruption, economic disaster, rampant disease, and stunning ignorance that have been and are the lot of huge numbers of human beings throughout the world—then we must help them to take possession of the traditions of political, economic, and intellectual freedom and civic responsibility to which they are rightful heirs.

Let me try to describe what this means in practice by telling you about the very fine public high school our daughter, Lee, attended before entering the University of North

Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she is now a sophomore. I am happy to report to you that there are many comparably good schools nationwide. There are never enough, but there would be more if there were greater parental involvement in our schools and greater parental dedication to the raising of children.

In the summer of 1986, I had completed my service as president of St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, and I had been offered foundation support to write two books on ethics and public policy. My wife, Alice, and I had before us the challenge of finding a high school committed to high standards of teaching, learning, and citizenship for Lee, who was just finishing the eighth grade. We knew that I could do my work whether we lived in Washington, New York, or Boston, and we were particularly interested in a number of public high schools in Northern Virginia. We also wanted to be able to buy a house within easy walking distance of the high school so that Lee and her friends and schoolmates would have a place to go between school and social events, athletic contests, and extracurricular activities without a lot of needless driving.

It turned out that residential property near two of the best high schools was simply out of our price range, so we confined our search to two others. The good news is that these high schools were and are as fine as any public or independent secondary schools this country has ever known. With our daughter's participation and concurrence in the decision, we settled across the street from a high school with a student population of nearly 2,000, and a very good teaching faculty and general curriculum, rather than near a magnet school in mathematics and the natural sciences. In the past two years, by the way, that

magnet school has graduated nearly one hundred merit scholar finalists. The entire city of Washington, DC, in the same two years, has graduated none.

My own view is that either of these high schools would have worked out fine for Lee. But Lee had already fallen in love with languages, especially Latin. The school we chose, Fairfax High School, had a four-year Latin program; given Lee's prior study of Latin, it appeared she would complete that program sometime during her junior year. When we visited the school and explained this to the principal and the truly exceptional Latin teacher, they promised that if Lee did complete the work on that timetable, the high school would provide her with advanced tutorials, including the study of classical lyric poets, through the time when she graduated.

The high school had a fine curriculum in mathematics from algebra through the calculus, demanding courses in history and literature that required a good bit of student writing, and strong courses in biology, chemistry, and physics. The school took work seriously; it also took play seriously, dedicating resources and time to worthwhile extracurricular activities, social events, and sports. And it took seriously high expectations and standards of citizenship in the school community, standards directly opposed to forms of behavior that harm others, cause suffering, and are self-destructive—no drugs, no alcohol, no smoking, no reckless driving, no fighting, and no two ways about it.

During the four years from her matriculation to her graduation, Lee brought many teenagers home. They varied substantially in their interests and in their habits of diligence, but they all knew that their school, their teachers, their band directors, their coaches, and many of their fellow students took them seriously—treated them with consideration. And

they reciprocated with much of the best in themselves. I should add that my wife, Alice, and I made ourselves available to these young people if they wanted to talk about books they were reading or colleges they might like to attend, and sometimes we raised questions with them about their studies and their aspirations. Often, of course, they were not there to visit with us, they had plans with Lee and with each other. We trusted Lee and her judgment, and we were determined not to be intruders.

We offered our house itself as an educational resource. The largest wall in our living room was covered with photographs, paintings, and framed letters written by heroes and heroines—human beings, ancient and modern, worthy of our admiration and emulation, despite their frailties.

Aristotle was there in a print of the famous Rembrandt painting in which Aristotle contemplates the bust of Homer and wears a medallion embossed with a profile of Alexander the Great. Our guests could see this single painting that celebrates contemplative intelligence in the philosopher, creative intelligence in the poet, and active intelligence in the statesman/warrior.

Nien Cheng's picture was there next to a letter from her about courage and self-discipline—she is the author of *Life and Death in Shanghai,* a woman held in solitary confinement by Communist China for seven years, tortured, her daughter murdered, who never gave a false confession. Nien Cheng refused to leave prison, because her Communist captors would not admit her innocence. Finally, in exasperation, two burly guards threw her into the street. When Alice, Lee, and I had the good fortune to become Nien Cheng's friends, I described, during a dinner at the White House, the kinship

between her immense courage and the philosophic wisdom of the ancient Stoics. I asked her about the roots of her fortitude. She spoke of her religious faith and of the fulfilling times that she spent while imprisoned dwelling in poetry she had learned as a child, poetry she thought she had forgotten. Then she said, "Oh, you do understand, Mr. Delattre. You see, I am not good at bowing down before bullies."

This is the stuff of which all great success is made. Children and youths deserve to learn of it, to learn that they are made of the same flesh and blood and spirit as the Nien Cheng's of the world. Our children need to understand, just as we need to understand, that even though our circumstances will probably never be as dire as Nien Cheng's, real dedication to our families and to the institutions we serve involves the same kind of principled fortitude that she achieved in such great measure.

A picture of Jim and Sybil Stockdale graced our wall. Jim, you may have noted, is Ross Perot's running mate in the presidential campaign. He was the ranking prisoner of war in Hanoi for eight years and leader of one of the most noble communities of human beings ever forged. Sybil founded the American League of Families of Prisoners of War, and she raised their four sons alone for those long years. Jim's leg was shattered on ejection from his plane, took two years to fuse at the knee, was then shattered a second time during torture, and took two more years to re-fuse. His captors offered to fix his leg when he fixed his politics. He refused, and so did they. Jim had studied philosophy at the graduate level while he was a naval wing commander, and one of his professors gave him a copy of the works of the Stoic Epictetus of ancient Rome. Epictetus was crippled as a slave boy and later freed, when his master was executed for complicity in Nero's suicide. As an adult, Epictetus said, "Lameness is an impediment to the leg, but not to the will." So

it was with Jim Stockdale, as he repeated this wisdom to himself every morning in solitary confinement. If we want our children to be successful, we must help them to learn that their own possibilities for achievement are equally rich, even when they take realistically their own limitations.

Martin Luther King, Jr., of whom we all know, was on our wall. The young deserve to learn of his dream that Americans would one day be judged on the content of their character rather than the color of their skin. Those of you who are of my generation will remember that when Martin Luther King, Jr., was murdered, many among us found solace in claiming, "You can kill the man, but you cannot kill the ideas, you cannot kill the dream." However comforting that thought may have been, it was not, and it is not, true. Dreams die. Ideas die. All it takes to kill them is to deprive the young of access to them. We wanted our living room to provide access.

There were others, including our parents and grandparents. But there were no celebrities; nobody famous only for being famous. Nobody perfect—all flesh and blood human beings.

The teenagers asked Lee about the pictures and letters, often kneeling against the back of our sofa to get close to the pictures and read the letters. "Who are these people? Why are they up here?" Lee would describe them as heroes and heroines, or we would if the young people asked us. Over and again, their response confirmed that even with a fine high school, it is best not to take too much for granted, because the students frequently looked perplexed and said they had been taught that there weren't any real heroes or heroines.

A world without heroes and heroines is a world of stunted aspiration and a diminished conception of what success in leading a life amounts to; it is a world in which the distinction between fertile ambition and selfish ambition is in danger of being lost, and where the difference between earning a profit by high levels of good quality productivity and service on the one hand, and getting rich in the short run by a selfish abandonment of the interests of stakeholders on the other, can be easily obscured. In any case, there is one thing all of us can take for granted: that schools cannot replace the family and cannot entirely fulfill the educational obligations of the family. After all, the family is the first and the greatest HEW ever conceived, and where it collapses or becomes educationally weak or even perverse, children and their prospects for success suffer.

Lee's Latin teacher was transferred to another school before Lee's senior year. A new, younger, but splendidly qualified Latin teacher, took her place. The departing teacher took it upon herself to tell the new teacher of the promises that had been made to Lee and to us and explained that Lee was already taking individual Latin tutorials. The new teacher immediately undertook to keep the rest of the promise, and she did so most admirably. Over and again, teachers and administrators brought their own intellectual and moral accomplishments into play for the sake of the students. They took the right things seriously.

For our daughter, the net result was that by the time she graduated from high school, she had completed seven full years of Latin, four years of German, some French and Italian; and more advanced mathematics than I had learned in a fast academic track through the end of my sophomore year in college. She had covered in detail the

fundamentals of inquiry in the natural sciences; had achieved a firm grounding in American history, despite time wasted in one inane, ninth-grade course in world civilizations; and had enjoyed a rich exposure to works of literature entirely worthy of her investment of time and energy. She did a lot of homework, probably about 30 to 35 hours in an average week, but she had plenty of time for ballet, for Color Guard, for play, dating, dallying on the telephone, and visiting friends from other parts of the state she had met in a summer Governor's School in the Fine Arts. By her own account, she had a very good time in high school.

Among the most important reasons she had a good time was that she was not trying to have a good time; she was trying to learn. She had a sense, not only from her mother and me and her grandparents, but also from her teachers, of the high purposes of education properly conceived. The harder she worked at learning, and the more she learned about learning from tutoring other students, the better she got at it; and the better she got, the more pleasure she derived from it. That's what comes, as all of us here have learned, of taking the right things seriously; just as surely as avoiding hard work leads to a stunted and diminished sense of one's self and the likelihood of persistent failure economically and otherwise.

Most of the students in that high school understood that if you foul your own nest by making the school dirty, messy, drug filled, dangerous, the only result is that you have an unsafe and an unpleasant place to live. So, there was a good bit of peer pressure in favor of civic responsibility.

There was also little or no hypocrisy among teachers and administrators; they advocated high standards and, for the most part, they embodied them, lived up to them. Their behavior reminded me then, as it does now, of one of former Secretary of Education Bill Bennett's favorite stories about a conversation he had with elementary school students during one of his trips around the country. These students told him they had a good school. He asked what made it good. They said the school had good rules and everybody followed them. He asked for an example. They said, "Well, there are pipes near the ceilings in the bathrooms, and the principal made a rule that no one could climb on them because somebody might get hurt. It's a good rule. We don't climb on the pipes. And neither does the principal."

These are the sorts of seriousness we ought to expect and encourage in formal education. They illuminate the answers to the question of who is fit to bear the public trust, what they must know, and do, and be. It is in such companionship with adults that the educational birthrights of the young come truly to life—in our children's lives. The challenge for your further thinking is to consider whether and how *America 2000* can advance such companionship for our children, and how advocates and critics alike can be drawn toward assiduous thinking about our children's lives above all else.

Thank you for your kind attention, and please feel free now to offer comments and criticism as well as questions.

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